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ABSTRACT

This document consists of four issues of a quarterly newsletter for educators at the elementary school level. Each issue features two articles and a column by an ACEI Executive Board vice president. The Fall 2000 issue features an article on reducing the amount of teacher control in elementary school learning centers, thereby providing benefits for teachers and students, and an article on describing opportunities for international travel fellowships for elementary school teachers. The vice president's column concerns integrating the Internet into the elementary school curriculum. The Winter 2000 articles address the use of drama as play and discuss incorporating interracial literature into the classroom. The vice president's column addresses science and mathematics activities available at an amusement park. The Spring 2001 issue discusses ways to foster communicative competence in a second language, including a list of teaching resources, and presents components of a writer's workshop. The vice president's column presents information on a social curriculum. The Summer 2001 issue features an article on a pen pal project between first graders and college students majoring in early childhood education, and the vice president's column on ways to provide guidelines for parents regarding early adolescents. (KB)

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Focus on Elementary (Ages 7-10): A Quarterly Newsletter for the Education Community, 2000-2001.

Barbara Foulks Boyd, Editor

Volume 13, Numbers 1-4

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ACEI

Fall 2000 • Vol. 13, No. 1

Focus on Elementary ages 7-10

A Quarterly Newsletter for the Education Community

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Letting Go:
Less Teacher Control of Center Time Leads to Benefits for All

Sue Grossman
Eastern Michigan University, with
Kimberly Sparks, 1st-Grade Teacher, and
Ruth Schwinefus, 1st-Grade Teacher

Learning centers actively involve children in the learning process, enhancing their skills with a minimum of teacher supervision (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999). They contribute to development of independence and autonomy, as children become responsible for their own work. Giving children choices among centers and activities allows them to practice decision-making skills (Grossman, 1997). Hands-on experiences with concrete objects promote cognitive development in appropriate ways (Patillo & Vaughn, 1992). Kim and Ruth, like many early childhood teachers, understand the benefits of learning centers and have been using them in their respective classrooms. Both teachers, however, noticed some problems with implementation, and so each set about rethinking her use of centers and making positive changes in the classroom.

In both classrooms, center time was teacher-controlled. Ruth used a rather complex workboard with icons to assign groups of children to centers in order to prevent problems with overcrowding. She noticed some children skipping centers to go on to those that were more appealing. Too often, children monitored each other's progress on assignments, which led to small arguments.

Jose was still working on the measuring activity in the math center. He was almost finished, but the time had come to move on. Janis shouted, "Teacher, Jose isn't moving to the reading center like he's supposed to!"

Kim rang a bell every 15 minutes to signal when it was time to move to the next center. She often saw children sitting unoccupied, unwilling to begin a project because they were afraid they could not finish it in the time left. Some simply waited for the bell to ring to tell them when to switch. Other children made seemingly endless trips to the bathroom or drinking fountain.

Both teachers believed they spent too much time and effort organizing and monitoring children's progress and behavior. They both wanted more time for student/teacher conferences, observations and assessments, and guided reading groups.

Letting Go

An action research assignment for a graduate class in which both teachers were enrolled led each, independent of the other, to explore relinquishing some teacher control and allowing children more freedom to choose. Interestingly, they both discovered some of the same benefits. Before changing anything, each explored her pupils' feelings about centers; Ruth gave her children a survey; and children in both classes wrote about centers in their journals. They talked about what they liked and/or disliked about having centers in the classroom, and what suggestions they had for changes. Both teachers learned that children wanted more autonomy in selecting centers and deciding how long to spend there.

Children appeared to feel more respectful and empowered once they were allowed the autonomy to make their own decisions about centers.

After considering this information, the teachers made changes. Children were now allowed to select their centers, choose whether to work in groups or alone, and decide on the amount of time they needed or wanted to spend in each. In Kim's case, the first week was quite rough. Children were confused, wandering around the room, and switching activities frequently. They seemed to be waiting for that bell to decide for them when to switch! Kim gritted her teeth and forced herself to be patient. Before long, both Kim and Ruth were realizing beneficial effects in their classrooms.

Children's Behavior Changes

Children began to exhibit fewer behavior problems and to work cooperatively more often, with the result that discipline was no longer a major issue (Grossman, 1997). Without the teacher-imposed time and location limits, no one felt pressured to finish work before moving on. Because children knew they could stay at a center as long as they wished, and could even return to their work the next day if they chose, there was no need to monitor others' time and work.

Motivation To Learn

Children's motivation soared. They became more absorbed in learning activities, perhaps spending as much as an hour on one work project. They completed additional work, sometimes becoming so interested and enthusiastic about a project that they started in on it even before school began. The number of bathroom and drinking fountain trips dwindled, and less aimless wandering was observed. Children were simply more invested in learning activities.

Emotional and Social Development

Children appeared to feel more respectful and empowered once they were allowed the autonomy to make their own

decisions about centers. Perhaps because of this, social development increased. Children began working at more mature levels of social participation (Parten, 1932). There was less solitary and parallel play, and more associative and cooperative play. Play themes became interwoven throughout the classroom (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). For example, after Kim read *The Little Red Hen* to her pupils, she noticed children cooperatively using themes and language from the story in the dramatic play area.

Teacher Benefits

The two teachers are now much less involved in scheduling and monitoring children's activities; therefore, they have more time for other things, such as reading groups, conferencing with their pupils, observing children's learning and development, and in general helping them reach a higher level of achievement. Since the children's behavior has improved, both teachers spend a great deal less time settling disputes and policing the classroom. Higher levels of child motivation mean fewer teacher interventions to redirect pupils back to the work at hand.

Kim and Ruth now feel more secure knowing their children are learning more, exhibiting more mature behaviors, and developing work and learning skills.

Plans for the Future

Both teachers agree they will allow children more autonomy in choosing centers in the future. Several weeks after the new center choosing strategy began, Kim discussed with her pupils their feelings about the changes in their classroom and how she should organize centers for next year's 1st-graders. Six-year-old Sonya felt the new way would be better for new 1st-graders because it was more like kindergarten, so they would be used to it. On the other hand, Tamara, with the profound insight of a 7-year-old, thought Kim should use the old way at first, because then the children could learn where the centers are and how to use them. So, the next school year will begin with more teacher control, and progress slowly to more freedom of choice as children learn the system. Children do indeed need to learn how to use centers and rotate through them effectively (Cowles & Aldridge, 1992), since that knowledge is not intuitive. Charlie, age 7, stated firmly that the next group shouldn't get to choose their own centers until March. Why March? "Because we didn't get to choose our centers until then, and it just wouldn't be fair!"

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Suggested Reading

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International Travel Fellowships and the Elementary Teacher

Judy J. Harris

"For years, I had lingered over National Geographic issues, never cutting out pictures out of some reverence. And then, I received an international fellowship to China. I climbed the steps and finally stood on top of the Great Wall of China. I realized that dreams really do come true! I'll never be the same and my teaching won't be the same either!"

—Janet T.

Janet T. is a 3rd-grade teacher, known for the quality of her instruction, love of children, and commitment to intercultural understanding. Her teacher's salary and family obligations kept her own knowledge of other people and other places relegated to secondary sources, or so she thought.

Through her memberships in professional organizations, Janet became aware of international fellowships for teachers. She requested an application form. For several years, she thought about applying. When the timing seemed good for her, Janet applied for a fellowship that fit her teaching needs. As a recipient, she studied in China for three weeks.

The benefits extended far beyond Janet's classroom. Her colleagues reported that the whole school experienced elation that one of their own

A real bread-baking lesson from the pros in Cairo!

could have such an experience. The send-off party drew the entire school community. When Janet returned, she gave talks and designed exhibits. Everyone learned about China.

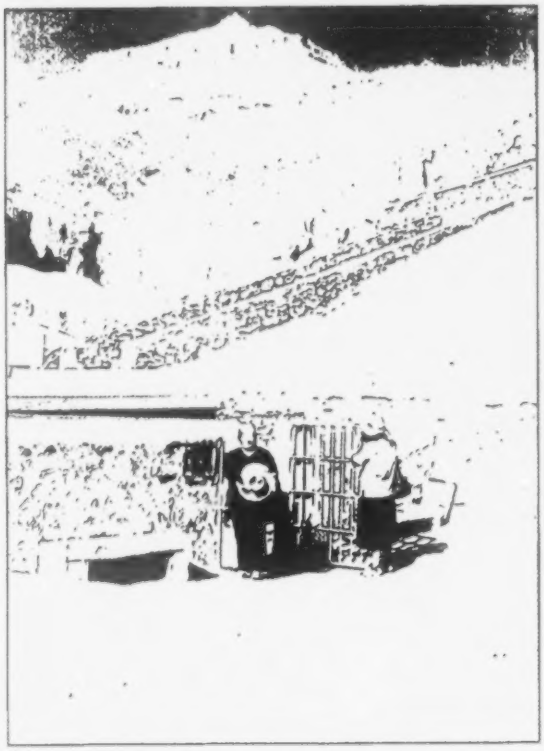
Janet's family benefited, as well. Now, her family attends international fairs and exhibits. Janet's son asked to join an international study group; at age 12, he visited Sweden. Soon, Janet's family will host its first international student.

* * * * *

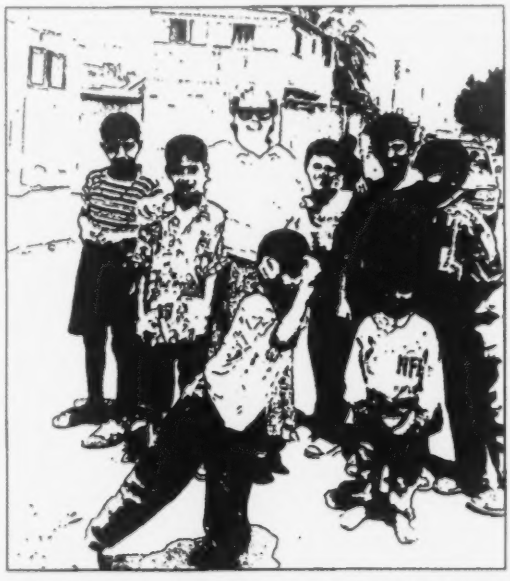
The benefits of international fellowships for teachers are far-reaching. Increasing numbers of elementary teachers are transforming their classrooms, schools, and communities as a result of such international experiences. Their research and service continues long after they return.

Many agencies and associations offer international travel opportunities to elementary school teachers in order to promote intercultural understanding. The application procedures are similar. Teachers need only to identify how the experience will benefit their professional work in its many avenues of expression. Usually, the cost, including air travel tickets from the recipient's home, is borne by the sponsoring organization.

The following list is a sample of the fellowships available to elementary school teachers and administrators. Consider obtaining an application for those fellowships that interest you.



Ready for a closer look inside King Tut's tomb, Valley of the Kings, Egypt



Palestinian friends who have just learned the hokey-pokey, Canada Camp, Gaza.

Learning a children's hand game in Kyongju, Korea

Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad Program
Office for Post Secondary Education
International Education and
Graduate Programs Service
Washington, DC 20202-5332

Host countries vary from year to year. In the summer of 2000, elementary school teachers studied in Poland, Hungary, Mexico, Guatemala, and India. The four- to six-week seminars include extensive travel in the host country. The application may be downloaded from www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/HEP/iegps/sap. Assistance is also available by calling 202-502-7625 or 202-502-7691. November 1, 2000, is the application deadline for 2001 programs. Sample: Mrs. E's Mail from Brazil at http://www.iren.net/cfpl/youth/mrse.html.

Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Program
Institute of International Education
1400 K Street, NW, Suite 650
Washington, DC 20005-2403

This comparatively new program provides three weeks of study in Japan with school-based experiences. Deadline is December 19, 2000, for the 2001 programs. To request an application, call 888-527-2636 or download an application from their Web site, http://www.iie.org/pgms/fmf.

The Korean Studies Fellowship
The Korea Society
950 Third Avenue, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10022-2705

The three weeks in Korea includes study and travel throughout South Korea. To put your name on the mailing list or to request an appli-cation, write to The Korea Society or call 212-759-7525. Application deadline is usually March 1.

National Endowment for
the Humanities (NEH)
Summer Seminars, Room 316
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20506

Some of the NEH programs include international travel. To receive information about seminar offerings, call 202-606-8380 and leave your name and address on the answering machine; send E-mail to: sem-inst@neh.gov; or check the Web site at http://www.neh.gov. Information about the next summer's offerings will be available in mid-autumn.

* * * * *

Where would you like to go? What international experiences would enhance your many professional roles and responsibilities?

Recently, Janet T. accepted an appointment to the International Committee of her local Chamber of Commerce. This summer, she had a fellowship to visit Germany!

American teachers place chains of paper cranes made by their students on the Sadako Monument, Hiroshima, Japan.

From the Vice President

Integrating the Internet into the curriculum

Realistically, today's teacher candidates will need to be continuously immersed in technology in order to remain on the cutting edge of technological advances for their students. How can that be possible? The pool of tomorrow's teachers includes not only teacher candidates, but also their cooperating teachers for student teaching experiences and their college methodology and content professors. This powerful group of educators can work together to infuse technology into the curriculum, thus providing rich opportunities that may enhance learning for our children.

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania has implemented a project that continuously immerses teachers in technology. It is know as The Technology Infusion in Teacher Education Model, and is implemented by Audiovisual Communications Technology (AVCT) faculty and led by David Peterson. During the spring and summer 2000 semesters, teacher candidates and their instructors were collegially involved in a variety of instructional and professional development activities. AVCT faculty served as technology collaborators/facilitators for triads of workshop participants consisting of professional education faculty, inservice teachers, and teacher candidates.

One group in the summer course included a 3rd-grade teacher and a children's literature/reading professor. One of the teacher candidates, Kevin, had completed two undergraduate courses related to audiovisual communication technology. The inservice teacher and college professor, by contrast, despite their many years of teaching experience, had no significant formal training in the use of such technology. Their goal was to develop a product that would involve 9-year-old students in the process of using the Internet as a resource to supplement their science/social studies curriculum. As a result of working together, both the inservice teacher and college professor increased their knowledge of technology, and the teacher candidate increased his knowledge of pedagogy. No one member of the group had all the answers; consequently, each member of the group felt successful.

How can 9-year-olds use the Internet effectively during school hours when their school is in the beginning stages of hardware acquisition? To help define parameters for Web site searches in group projects, Kevin's team compiled a Web Walk-about. They related it to a future study unit on marsupials, and tied it in to the Olympic Games in Sydney, which would be underway when the school year began. The group used a software program called Adobe PageMill to compose "Web Walkabout: Koala Lou, Where are you?" State and national standards for technology education and reading and writing provided additional focal points. The group described the walkabout in lesson plan format and provided demonstrations via a Power Point presentation.

The Web Walkabout might be introduced with a shared reading of *Koala Lou*, written by Mem Fox. Then the students would be given backpack journals that they take to their computer workstations. There, they will learn the process of using the Internet to gain information about marsupials by completing the walkabout. They can answer questions given on the walkabout microcomputer screen by clicking on links to Web sites. Kevin's group decided that hyper-links to Web sites would be more developmentally appropriate for 9-year-olds at this time than the long URLs, or Web site addresses. After students become adept at visiting sites, they can learn how to discover additional sites within curricular guidelines, with appropriate supervision. Once they complete their walkabouts, they will transfer that information into their journals. Finally, they will give short reports as part of a classroom group.

The potential power inherent within this collaboration is clear. Technology changes rapidly, always making way for further advances. Taking a class or two is not enough to promote technology integration into the curriculum. Being on the cutting edge of the learning curve in the use of technology within the curriculum means that teachers need to immerse themselves in technology so that they will be able to provide appropriate learning opportunities for their students.

Readers may gain more information by contacting David Peterson, Dept. Chair AVCT, Kutztown University of PA, 19530; E-mail: peterson@kutztown.edu; or visiting www.kutztown.edu/acad/coe/avct/projects/infusion/workshops2000/index.htm.

Please share your comments, questions, and ideas about integrating the Internet into the curriculum with me at burnett@kutztown.edu. I look forward to hearing from you and will try to follow up on your suggestions.

—Jeanie Burnett, Vice President Representing Intermediate/Middle Childhood

Call for Manuscripts

The readership of *Focus on Elementary* is encouraged to submit ideas and manuscripts related to the education and development of children ages 7 to 10. Editorial assistance is available if needed.

If you have any materials or suggestions to be considered, please contact the Editor:

Barbara Foulks Boyd

P.O. Box 187

Riner, VA 24149

Focus on Elementary

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Making Classrooms Come Alive:
Drama As Play

Jeffrey S. Kaplan,
Educational Foundations,
College of Education,
University of Central Florida, Orlando

"Again?"

Upon hearing this, I looked up with a hesitancy that I have come to identify as, "Uh oh."

"Are we doing this, again?" the 5th-grader asked.

I now knew why I was so hesitant to look up.

The scene was an observation of a student teacher—a 5th-grade elementary school student teacher—who was busy passing out dittoes on multiplication. As anyone knows, elementary school students certainly need practice in learning multiplication, but this 5th-grader was wise to my student teacher's agenda.

"Didn't we do this worksheet before?" he wondered.

I watched the scene unfolding before my eyes. This was not routine. A 5th-grader was thinking critically about the lesson and a student teacher was being forced to confront her teaching choices.

"Yes, but don't worry," she replied. "It's just review."

I looked down, hoping the student teacher had not spurred a volcano into eruption, but alas, I was wrong.

"But, again? I already did this! Why do I have to do this again?" the 5th-grader mumbled.

A quick stare from my student teacher halted his "momentary temper tantrum" and he pulled out his gnawed pencil and

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quickly set to work on the familiar worksheet.

Ah, sweet victory! Or was it?

The Need To Seek Alternatives

Student teachers always walk a fine line between doing what they think they are supposed to do and what they want to do. The line is drawn somewhere in an imaginary lesson planning book when the student teacher crosses the threshold into his or her supervising teacher's classroom. Suddenly joined at the hip for one semester, the two—student teacher and classroom supervisor—must think and act like one.

Time and time again, college coordinators watch smart, innovative, and enthusiastic student teachers become complacent, conforming, staid individuals who rarely break from standard classroom practices and traditions. Often, student teachers emulate their supervising teacher's teaching style, hardly deviating from their methods of delivery or instructional style. If the supervising teacher hands out endless dittoes for the students to complete, then the student teacher does the same. If the supervising teacher divides students into reading groups according to ability levels, then the student teacher follows suit. If the supervising teacher teaches spelling by using pre- and posttests, then the student teacher adheres to this regimented and autocratic format. Creativity is replaced by conformity; ingenuity is underscored by tradition.

The 5th-grader had jumped at the chance to play teacher and, moreover, he was very effective. Standing before his peers, his anger became humor as he joked his way through multiplication lessons.

Motivating student teachers to explore their teaching as reflective and responsive practitioners takes time and patience. Student teachers want to graduate and they are reluctant to do anything that will "rock the boat." They know that they are guests in another teacher's classroom and that once they leave this classroom the supervising teacher will have to pick up where they left off. Still, it is the responsibility of college coordinators to encourage student teachers to take a more thoughtful approach to their practice instruction and to encourage them to wrestle with the larger issues that confront all educators. "In a classroom that focuses on understanding," says Howard Gardner, "teachers are clear about the understandings that they value and the understandings that they want students to exhibit" (Scherer, 1999, p. 13). Simply put, student teachers must be asked, "What do you want to happen in your internship classroom and how do you want it to happen?"

On the Power of Reflective Practice

As a college supervisor of student interns, I encourage my practicing teachers to talk to me about their teaching in a variety of transactional and reflective formats. Reflection is considered a process and a method of giving reason to action or practice (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Russell & Munby, 1992; Schon, 1988, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1987), as a dynamic process with action implicit in its meaning (Schon, 1983). Louden (1991) characterizes reflection in terms of introspection, rehearsal, replay, inquiry, and spontaneity.

My student teachers meet in small group sessions, write in daily journals, communicate via E-mail, and talk to their colleagues or me on the phone. Their personal student teaching

journeys are filled with unique classroom anecdotes and teacher moments. Moreover, each discussion technique—small group, journals, online, or phone conversations—provides its own instructional advantages and disadvantages. They learn as much from each other's sharing as they do from their own experiences, and each conversation highlights the remarkable quality of one-to-one personal interaction. Teaching is a people business; encouraging teachers, new and experienced, to look inside their own teaching requires time and patience. Educator David Perkins (1999) writes:

> Considerable research shows that active engagement in learning may lead to better retention, understanding, and active use of knowledge. A social dimension to learning—what is sometimes called collaborative or cooperative learning—often, although not always, fosters learning. Sometimes, engaging students in discovery or rediscovery processes energizes them and yields deeper understanding. (p. 8)

What follows is the narrative of one student teacher's personal journey, and how she came to question her own student teaching practices. "Angela" is typical of many of my student teachers: young, hesitant, eager-to-please, dying to achieve, yet frightened of her own intuition. Her teaching is locked inside pages of county curriculum packages and prescribed master dittoes. Still, beneath this formulaic exterior rests a student teacher with a burning desire to make a difference, yet a reluctance to try. Thus, a college coordinator must strive to spark Angela's hidden talent so that, maybe, just a "smidgen" can reach the surface. Angela must learn to tap into her inner self so that she can bring to her 5th-graders not just what they have seen time and time again—the worksheets, the spelling tests, the reading groups—but also the motivation to see the world through creative eyes.

One Small Step At a Time

When I asked Angela about the math ditto and the reluctant student, she said she knew that something was wrong the moment the young boy said the word "again." She told me that his frustration "at doing stuff he already knew" had surfaced before in class, and that she had taken great pains to assure the student that when he finished his work early, he could go onto other things—like quiet reading or doing fun puzzles. While the 5th-grader had nodded approvingly, she could tell that he wanted something more. When I asked Angela what that "more" was, she turned to me and said, "Oh, you know, something he can do with others. He just doesn't like sitting alone. He wants to talk to his friends."

Sensing an opening, I asked Angela if she had thought of other ways to introduce multiplication to her students. Angela said that she had been too busy following the prescribed lessons of her supervising teacher and that she was reluctant to change his format. After all, she responded, "This is his class. I don't want to upset anything." I told her that while I understood her reluctance, sometimes you must try new things just to see if you can do it. I pointed out that her supervising teacher might agree to a slight change in format. She said she would think about it and that she would think of other things to do. I left it at that, hoping I had nudged her into thinking.

That evening, I sent an E-mail message to Angela and asked her how the rest of her day had gone. She responded that everything went fairly smoothly, and that her teaching had been routine and uneventful. "We went from one activity to another," she remarked, "without a hitch." I asked her if she had thought of an alternative strategy for her math instruction and she said she was going to ask the 5th-grader who was bored to explain the problems to the class. I responded that this was a fine start and that I would be anxious to hear the results.

A week later, she let me know that the 5th-grader had jumped at the chance to play teacher and, moreover, he was very effective. Standing before his peers, his anger became humor as he joked his way through multiplication lessons. He wrote math problems on the overhead, calling on the other 5th-graders to answer his questions. Angela remarked that the boy began to display a hitherto hidden understanding of multiplication and human relations. This once defiant 5th-grader—bored with routine and angry with teachers who imposed sameness—had suddenly become the center of attention. His learning came alive because his student teacher had allowed him

continued on page 5 . . .

Use of Interracial Literature:
A Topic Whose Time Has Come

Dr. Guang-Lea Lee,
Assistant Professor of Reading Program,
Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction,
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

The number of interracial children in U.S. schools has tripled over the past 30 years, and the number is projected to increase well into the 21st century. The time when children could identify themselves simply as white, black, or Asian has long passed. Now children come in a rich assortment of colors from a variety of mixed-race parentage.

Statistics show that the number of interracial marriages in the United States now exceeds 1.7 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). The number of mixed-race infants is increasing 26 times as fast as that of any other group in the United States (Smolowe, 1998).

Although the number of students with mixed-race parents has increased significantly, there is a void in instructional materials depicting these children, as well as a general lack of attention by teachers to the unique needs of these students. Interracial children need instructional materials and activities that depict their mixed ancestry so they can identify with appropriate role models, develop positive self-esteem, and change the way they look at their world.

To help children identify appropriate role models, schools should provide literature featuring appropriate family settings, characters with multiracial physical characteristics, and life stories of fictitious and non-fictitious interracial persons. By using such literature, interracial and mixed family cultures can become a part of the school's curriculum and allow interracial children to find role models with whom they can identify (Wardle, 1993).

To develop a sense of self-esteem, interracial literature should be integrated into the curriculum. Such materials can contribute to interracial children's understanding of how they are perceived and appreciated by the school and society. Reading books about interracial families, and playing with toys, puzzles, and dolls that feature a variety of cultural characteristics, can help an interracial child develop a positive identity (Benjamin, 1996; Blau, 1998). When interracial students see their lives reflected in literature, their self-esteem grows.

In addition to helping interracial children develop positive role models and positive self-

> *The number of mixed-race infants is increasing 26 times as fast as that of any other group in the United States.*

esteem, interracial literature—used regularly in classroom—also changes the way other students look at their world, by offering different perspectives. Through reading materials focusing on interracial people's daily lives, students of all races can learn more about what it means to be human and realize that people of all cultural groups have similar emotions, needs, and dreams (Bishop, 1994, 1997).

Incorporating interracial literature into the classroom will help all students develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to survive and function effectively in a global society. All children can gain from exposure to interracial instructional materials, because they will enhance their understanding of people from all kinds of families and cultures.

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. . . continued from page 3

some creativity. Even Angela's supervising teacher noticed a difference, and complimented Angela for providing the student with a forum for his pent-up frustration.

Mind you, Angela remarked, the 5th-graders were still working on multiplication dittoes—dittoes they had seen time and time again. They were being entertained, however, by a new teacher, one of their own. The young boy's remarkable poise made a change in the atmosphere of this traditional classroom.

When Teaching Becomes Play

Learning to make teaching playful requires a willingness to move students from comfortable to uncomfortable situations. Teachers and students must assume new and defining roles not only as leaders and followers, but also as mentors and guides. Moreover, teachers and students share both roles. We learn from each other in an arena where learning becomes a shared conversation, rather than a traditional lecture. We learn to appreciate our talents and strengths in a spirit of joy and discovery.

Sensing Angela was ready for something new, I notified her that I would be at her class the next day to watch her in action. She said she would make sure her special 5th-grader would be "in action." I arrived the next morning, found a seat in the back of the classroom and found our favorite 5th-grader entertaining his peers with the intricacies of long division. Quickly, I realized that the young man had a ready command of his audience. Other students delighted in being called on by him and were eager to raise their hands. I found Angela's supervising teacher watching with the same bemusement that I felt, and he quickly informed me that this was the highlight of his 5th-grade class day. I told him I understood, and quietly asked if he thought other students could benefit from such exposure. He raised his eyebrows, lost in thought, and then said, "Perhaps. Maybe Sean."

I found Sean, a rambunctious 10-year-old who could barely contain himself as he shot his hand feverishly into the air to offer an answer. He wanted to be part of the action, and his anxiousness translated into literally jumping from his seat

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to answer questions. When I mentioned this to Angela later, she said that she was thinking of trying the same thing with Sean. She would invite him to teach a math lesson, as well. She would invite him to perform.

When Learning Becomes Play

What my student teacher realized is that real authentic instruction begins when learners assume ownership for their learning. Margaret G. McKeown and Isabel L. Beck (1999) write

> For effective learning to occur, students must construct their own knowledge and teachers must orient their instructional practices toward teaching for understanding. Instead of transmitting knowledge to students, the teacher becomes their guide and helper, assisting students to make their own connections. (p. 25)

When students become teachers, they assume a role that allows them to confront who they are and, more important, who they are capable of being. They realize their innate potential and translate the resultant energy into positive and creative understandings. Knowing their strengths empowers them to achieve an awareness of themselves.

Student-centered instruction can be realized through the infusion of dramatic play in classroom instruction. As my student teacher recognized, dramatic play can be as simple as standing before the class and delivering a lesson. This simple act, requiring no special materials, became the driving force for my student teacher's lesson, and the impetus for a change in her thinking about her own teaching. With that change to her perspective, she began to provide a forum for students to leave their seats and engage in active learning. The student became the focus of attention.

Dramatic play can enliven and invigorate any classroom lesson. Whether students are delivering lessons or pretending to be someone else, teachers can break traditional instruction techniques and venture into unknown territory. They can transform ordinary lessons into lively discussions and playful retreats into childhood fantasies—all under the careful and watchful eye of professional educators.

Still, a word of caution. Dramatic play cannot be achieved without risks. Teachers must be willing to abandon the safe high ground and yield to the adventurous and unknown. They must leave behind conformity and embrace risk. The advantages will be many. I am pleased I had the chance to talk to my student teacher about her concerns and that she, in time, began to recognize how ordinary lessons can be enriched by dramatic play. However simple it may be.

And she realized that the "same old, same old" need not be done "again and again."

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coaster quest: exploring science and mathematics at an amusement park

Most educators accept the idea that when students are actively engaged in authentic problem-solving situations, their learning is more pleasurable, and perhaps more meaningful, than when they participate in lecture/lab type activities. But discovering and managing such authentic learning situations is no easy task. Educators throughout the United States are turning to collaborations with businesses and universities in their communities to provide stimulating learning environments.

In Pennsylvania, Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom Amusement Park, Lehigh Valley regional school districts, and Kutztown University of Pennsylvania are pursuing one such collaboration—Coaster Quest: The Physics and Math of Thrill Rides. Although many people are to be credited for this collaboration, here we will refer to the work of Joseph Elias, Kathleen Dolgos, Deborah Frantz, and Keith Koepke.

The main goal of Coaster Quest is to provide stimulating and challenging exploratory math and science experiences for the whole learning community: students, teachers, teacher candidates, and teacher educators. In this process, families and the broader community become active participants in their children's education. Approximately 1,800 students participated in Coaster Quest last year. Their fun stood on the shoulders of many dedicated professionals who had planned and refined activities over a two-year period. A core of science and mathematics teachers participated in all stages of development, and the professional staff of Dorney Park extended guidance and technical support to those who developed the laboratories. Academic excellence for the students remained the constant focal point; Coaster Quest was considered a means to teach focused concepts.

In preparation for the event, teachers met at Dorney Park for a workshop/orientation one Saturday several weeks before the event. There, they had an opportunity to tour the park in a non-operational setting with those who helped create the program. With student safety as a major concern, everyone was sure to learn rules of park operation so that they could have a safe and enjoyable day when the big day dawned. "Tips for Teachers" included a list of suggested equipment and supplies to bring to the park, as well as ideas for concept review and data collection strategies. Teachers decided how students from their individual schools would choose rides and problems.

As an offshoot of Coaster Quest, the committee decided to use physics and math applications for a coaster building adventure for regional science and mathematics classes. The K'NEX Corporation donated three tons of model parts. Teachers developed the rules, plans, and guidelines for a pilot program to encourage students to apply their understanding of science and math in good-spirited competitions among the schools. In culmination, the students brought their fabulous coasters to Kutztown University. They were eager to demonstrate their model thrill rides and provide the calculations that showed why these coasters would work well. Whatever the outcome of the contests, all the students learned math and science, as well as persistence and teamwork.

Plans are underway to enhance and update both the theme park and model construction events. This year, Coaster Quest will include math and science for middle school levels. For further information about these events, contact either Kathleen Dolgos, Dept. Chair, Secondary Education; or Joseph Elias, Secondary Education, Kutztown University of PA 19530; E-mail: elias@kutztown.edu.

Please plan to join members of the Intermediate/Middle Childhood Committee in Toronto at the Focus Luncheon on April 4, to learn more about current Coaster Quest plans. We encourage everyone to attend and share good food and clever ideas about making science and mathematics authentic for our learners. I look forward to our meeting in Toronto. Meanwhile, I welcome your comments about this event, or any committee-related insights.

—Jeanie Burnett, Vice President Representing Intermediate/Middle Childhood

Call for Manuscripts

The readership of *Focus on Elementary* is encouraged to submit ideas and manuscripts related to the education and development of children ages 7 to 10. Editorial assistance is available if needed.

If you have any materials or suggestions to be considered, please contact the Editor:

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Other Than English in Elementary Schools: Fostering Communicative Competence in a Second Language

Luisa Araujo, Assistant Professor, Literacy and Reading/Language Arts, William Paterson University, Wayne, New Jersey

"Children under 10 who experience enough natural communication nearly always succeed in attaining native-like proficiency."

These words were written almost 20 years ago by researchers (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 78) in the field of second language acquisition. More recently, much attention has been devoted to children's early learning of a second language. Indeed, action plans for the promotion of language education in the United States stress that every child should be able to communicate well in at least one language other than English, beginning in the early grades (American Council of Teachers on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). In 1996, the National Standards in Foreign Language Project advanced new curriculum goals for the teaching of foreign languages with a particular focus on young students' communicative ability. Concurrently, state level initiatives have begun to propose World Language standards and to mandate state assessments of language proficiency as early as 4th grade. In New Jersey, for example, 4th-grade students are expected to, and will be assessed on their ability to, "... communicate at a basic level in a language other than English" (New Jersey State Department of Education, 1996, p. 6).

Teachers who have had a young non-English speaking child join

What can World Language teachers do to facilitate language proficiency in a language other than English?

1. *Use the target language for a set amount of all instructional time (e.g., 60 minutes a week, beginning in 2nd or 3rd grade).*
2. *Expose students to all modes of language—listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing—for purposeful communication.*
3. *Support children's listening comprehension by repeating key sentences, and by using visuals, gestures, and Total Physical Response (TPR).*
4. *Support children's speaking ability by enacting TPR Storytelling and creating role-playing scenarios (e.g., Ordering Food at the Restaurant, Buying Groceries).*
5. *Provide children with hands-on activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing (e.g., have children match pictures to words, construct a picture dictionary).*
6. *Use the target language to teach content (e.g., use Spanish to teach about the life cycle of a butterfly).*

What can regular classroom teachers do to support language learning?

1. *Label the classroom in the target language.*
2. *Use literature that depicts the language and culture students are learning about (e.g.,* Abuela, *by Arthur Dorros).*
3. *Reinforce language routines, such as greetings during break or snack time.*
4. *Sing songs with the children in the target language.*
5. *Encourage students to research a country where the target language is spoken.*
6. *Invite guest speakers who are native speakers of the language or who have traveled to countries where the language is spoken.*

their class of 1st- to 4th-grade students can attest to the rapid language growth they observed in a short period of time. Indeed, teachers and researchers alike believe, and have witnessed, children's natural aptitude to learn another language in the early years (Tabors, 1998). But how can language teachers and regular classroom teachers create the best environment in which that natural aptitude can flourish? And how can teachers fit Spanish, French, Japanese, or Chinese into their busy schedules?

The Language-Learning Classroom

Language teachers can help elementary school children develop language proficiency by immersing the students in the target language. Young children acquire a second language in much the same way they learned their first language (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991; Lipton, 1995). Therefore, students need repeated opportunities to listen to and to use the second language in meaningful contexts (Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Lipton, 1998b). Thus, language games, music, and art activities should be emphasized.

Games such as *debajo del puente*, similar to London Bridge, serve as opportunities to practice vocabulary and to learn the similarities and differences between childhood games of different cultures (Villamil, 1998). As students are playing this game and learning the song that goes along with it, the teacher can enrich the language experience by exposing students to the printed version of the song and by listing different vocabulary words needed to play the game. Integrating reading and writing with listening and speaking is known to enhance language proficiency (Lipton, 1998a). Thus, teachers should focus on using print to reinforce the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects of language (e.g., dialogues, songs, culture-specific expressions).

Other teaching and learning strategies capitalize on young children's propensity to learn by doing and by using their senses. The Total Physical Response (TPR) approach and pantomime are especially appealing to young language learners. TPR relies on command sequences (Celestino, 1993) that ask children to sit down, stand up, and touch body parts when they hear the teacher say the corresponding command sequences in the target language. Pantomime requires the class to respond through script imitation (Curtain & Pesola, 1994). For example, children can learn language greetings by role-playing or imitating a role that

Teaching Resources
(includes teaching guides, children's literature, and videocassettes)

Araujo, L. (1999). O bom barqueiro. *Hispania, 82*(3), 527-528. [Spanish]
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can be performed initially by props such as puppets. Pantomime and TPR maximize the use of the target language and eliminate the need for translation. Indeed, quality language programs concentrate on the use of the target language for most of the instructional time (Lipton, 1995).

The method of TPR storytelling capitalizes on using the target language exclusively to further students' narrative skills. Students learn simple stories by using body language to enact the script. When they say "the cat," for example, they might gesture petting a cat and say "meow." Later, they develop their own stories using the simple vocabulary they have learned as a foundation (Ray, 1998).

Another recent approach that fosters students' communicative competence is content-based instruction (Christian, 1996). In this model, students study the target language to further their knowledge of other disciplines (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996). For example, when students utilize the target language to record weather observations around the globe, and to measure, calculate, and report data, they are learning social studies, science, mathematics, geography, language arts, and culture (Austin, Jensen, Kennedy, & Odell, 1998).

This approach enriches the language experience and leads students to learn content. From a teacher's point of view, this can be a good option because the social studies curriculum and/or the science curriculum can be aligned with the language curriculum. Thus, learning a language would not take time away from learning other subjects.

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Web Sites
(includes reference sites, lesson plan banks, games, and articles)

Awesome Library
http://www.awesomelibrary.org/
Educational Games
http://www.quia.com
Lesson Plans on the Web
http://www.sabine.k12.la.us/vrschool/lessplan.htm
Key Pal Information
http://www.furman.edu/~pecoy/mfl195/weburls.htm
Multilingual Web at the ACF
http://www.nyu.edu/acf/multilingual/index.html
Spanish Games
http://www.spanishpride.com/main/game.html

4

Writer's Workshop

Danielle Landry Di Carlo

If you were to enter my classroom on any afternoon, you would see a few children huddled together in a corner of the room, a few more scattered on the floor around the room, and maybe another handful seated at their desks. It may be difficult to find me, as I could be on the floor with a small group of children, and I might not even see or hear you walk in. At first, you will think that this is not a teaching time of the day. Once you step further into the room, however, you will see that this is far from the truth. You will see children reading each other's work or helping one another with a spelling word. You could find me on the floor listening to a child read a story and making suggestions on how to make it better. You may spot children under tables writing so intensely that you do not want to bother them. This is Writer's Workshop.

Writer's Workshop is a program that teaches children the conventions of writing. Students not only learn about proper grammar and punctuation, but also come to value the importance of drafting, revising, and editing their writing. This process provides children with numerous opportunities to practice and internalize what goes into a piece of writing, just as a professional author does (Reising, 1997). Additionally, children learn how conferencing, with the teacher and peers, can help them become better writers. Research shows that this type of writing process increases students' independence and self-efficacy (Clippard, 1998).

Educator Nancie Atwell considers Writer's Workshop to be "authentic" learning because students write about what interests them and what is important to them. They use their lives and own experiences to help them select the topic they write about (Clippard, 1998). Children as young as 5 can learn the routines and practices that expert writers use in their writing. I teach my students to ask themselves the question, "What do I know or care a lot about?"

Writer's Workshop is a daily activity that lasts 45 to 60 minutes. Nancie Atwell has found that if children expect to write every day, they will start to acquire the habits of a good writer. Atwell further suggests that one habit of a good writer is thinking about writing all the time, not just during "writing time." If the day does not include Writer's Workshop, my students become very upset with me. "What do you mean we can't have writing today?" "I was going to conference with you today."

Lucy Calkins, director of the Writing Project at Teacher's College at Columbia University, stresses the need to keep Writer's Workshop "predictable and simple" (Calkins, 1990, p. 23). She explains that teachers must scaffold and guide the class towards becoming a community of good writers. This is not an easy task to complete, and it takes time to establish rules and routines.

The Components of Writer's Workshop

The Mini-Lesson

One component of Writer's Workshop—the mini-lesson—can occur at the beginning or the end of writing. This is a time when the teacher can meet with the whole class and discuss a writing concern, look at an issue at hand, model techniques, or reinforce a skill (Calkins, 1994). Lucy Calkins believes that "in mini-lessons, we teach into our student's intentions" (Calkins, 1994, p. 193). In other words, mini-lessons allow teachers to use the children's strengths and weaknesses to teach them how to improve their writing skills. Usually, I begin my writer's workshop with a mini-lesson. We gather on the rug as a whole class, and I present my brief lesson. It is important to keep in mind that a mini-lesson is no more than 5 to 10 minutes long.

As structure is important during writer's workshop, one type of mini-lesson focuses on procedural issues (Calkins, 1994). For example, my class knows that each month I name new folder monitors to get the folders (which contain their writing) for the children at their table. It is the folder monitors' responsibility to hand out the folders at the start of Writer's Workshop and to

collect them at the end. I also used a mini-lesson to address the issue of what to do if a student needs to conference with me and I am busy. I had noticed that many children would stop writing until they could speak with me. During the mini-lesson, I explained that they were wasting valuable writing time. Together, the class and I devised a list of what to do if they were stuck and could not conference immediately with me (ask a friend; mark the spot you need help on, and go on; reread the piece to see if a solution presents itself). The students began to realize that they did not need to conference with me as much as they thought they did.

In another type of mini-lesson, the teacher models strategies and skills that all writers need to use, such as punctuation. Many 1st-graders neglect to use periods at the end of sentences. In the mini-lesson, I read my own piece without the use of periods, making sure to read without taking a breath. The children are quick to point out that I read it too fast. This makes an excellent segue into the importance of periods. Other strategies focus on editing and revising—re-reading for punctuation, content, and meaning. Sometimes a mini-lesson may stem from a student's work. I may share with the class a style of writing one particular child used, such as repetition, and suggest that other students try it in their writing. I stress the word "suggest," as I do not expect every child to write in the same way. Mini-lessons are not dictated speeches, but rather a time to present and empower students with tools and strategies needed to become better writers.

Mini-lessons can help create a feeling of community. Lucy Calkins eloquently says, "To create the warm glow around the workshop . . . is to read aloud from wonderful literature" (Calkins, 1994, p. 194). You may read a poem or a story to the class, keeping in mind that the purpose is not to turn writing time into reading time. I often tell my class to listen as writers. Reading literature to your class illustrates ways to make connections to one's own life, and demonstrates styles that a child may choose to use in his or her own writing (Hindley, 1996). If you decide to read a piece of literature to your class during a mini-lesson, it should usually be a re-read. Writer Joanne Hindley states that if you want to point out something an author has done, you cannot expect students to learn it from a story the class has not heard before (Hindley, 1996). At the beginning of the year, you might choose a few books of different genres that you can refer to continually through-

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out the year. My favorites include Donald Crews's *Bigmamas*, poems by Eloise Greenfield and Valerie Worth, and Margaret Wise Brown's *The Important Book*.

Conferencing

After the mini-lesson, students choose their "writing spots" and begin to work. There are occasions when I will move children if I feel that they need to find a spot where they can work better. It is during this writing time that conferencing occurs.

Conferencing allows students to discuss any problems they are experiencing in their writing, and to figure out ways to solve them. It also enables children to reflect on their own understanding of their writing (Clippard, 1998). As the children go off to write, I like to walk around the room and get a sense of where the children are in their writing. At the beginning of the year, I found that a majority of my individual conferences focused on taking risks as writers. Many children were afraid to write if they could not spell a word. I encourage them to stretch out sounds, writing the letters they heard. In conferences, I can see who knows the letters in the alphabet, and who needs extra help. It is very important to allow the child to speak about his or her writing. A conference is not about taking over and telling the child what to do; instead, it helps students gain independence and learn the skills that will enhance their writing.

The hardest part of a conference is looking beyond punctuation and grammar and seeing the potential the child has as a writer. A teacher must carefully listen to the child read his piece, and think about the content and style of writing (Graves, 1983). Consider the child's writing as a "work in progress," and do not cringe at every mechanical error. Conferences will lead the child toward a final piece, but it takes time.

Peer-conferencing is highly recommended during Writer's Workshop. It is important that children not only learn how to write, but also be able to discuss strengths and weaknesses in their peers, and to make suggestions (Reising, 1997). In my room, I encourage partners and small groups to meet and read their pieces to each other. I have found that the students enjoy helping each other. The more they help one another, the less backlog there is of students waiting to conference with me.

Sharing

At the conclusion of Writer's Workshop, we usually spend time sharing. Lucy Calkins (1990) identifies two purposes for share time. The first is to encourage children. The second is to allow a public teacher conference. Sharing not only helps the particular child whose work is being read, but also may help students who are listening to apply the advice towards their own work. I believe that share time builds the children's confidence in public speaking, and allows them to get new ideas.

A very formal type of sharing is called a writing celebration. This is the celebration of the final publication. After the draft is revised and edited by the individual, peers, and the teacher, the child publishes his or her best work. The number of celebrations varies from class to class. I try to have a celebration every month or two. During the celebration, the children share their final piece with an audience. The teacher chooses the audience. It could be a celebration with their peers, parents, or other faculty from the school. A writing celebration is a closing to weeks of hard work and determination. It makes children feel like real authors!

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social curriculum in action: learning to take care of ourselves and others

Treat others like you want to be treated. Mind your own business. What part of that is my problem? These thoughts raced through Mrs. Regent's mind when some 5th-grade students hurried to her side after lunch one day exclaiming that they needed to "discuss cafeteria." They reported that their lunch break had become very stressful because some students were "rude, noisy, and gross." The students wondered if cafeteria could be the topic for their class meeting that week. Mrs. Regent agreed to help them develop an agenda about the problems.

The students knew that they first needed to state their problem and then develop a plan to resolve it. Initially, these two steps seemed to encompass the entire process, so they wrote "cafeteria problem" and "solution to cafeteria problem" on the board as the meeting agenda. Reflecting on the modeling, role-playing, and practicing that she had implemented at the beginning of the year, Mrs. Regent knew she would need to facilitate a potentially long-term, authentic problem-solving situation. For the meeting to be effective, the students would need to follow the "steps for problem-solving" as presented by Ruth Charney (1999):

- Introduce the problem and review the rules
- Gather information
- Begin discussion
- Propose solutions
- Choose a solution
- Choose a consequence
- Close the meeting. (p. 80)

Before the meeting, Mrs. Regent went over her plans to expand the cafeteria discussions with a review of the healthful lifestyle curriculum. She reviewed her journal entries and lesson plans and reviewed important information about the children's health issues, family values, and lifestyles. For instance, she knew that Corinne's family raised organic vegetables and did not eat meat. Arthur's father owned a slaughterhouse where many local hunters took their deer to be dressed. Ronnie was diabetic and always had an emergency snack ready, but Elizabeth wanted to be a model and so avoided sitting near Ronnie. Some of the children knew this personal information about their friends, but Mrs. Regent knew it was her responsibility to keep confidential information shared only in family conferences. Thus, she knew she had to closely monitor class-meeting procedures to protect privacy.

Students were eager to begin the meeting the next day. Susan, the student leader of the week, asked the others to bring their chairs to the meeting circle. She told the class members that they were going to gather information about cafeteria problems by taking turns around the circle, telling one thing about cafeteria problems or passing if they had no concerns. Mrs. Regent served as board recorder so she could reflect students' concerns, but at the same time model polite and considerate language. After each of the students had responded, the timekeeper called for closure. The students realized that the cafeteria problem was more serious than initially thought. Susan asked what they should do next; Arthur suggested that they group the problems and brainstorm solutions. Upon Mrs. Regent's suggestion, the class agreed that there were three main problems: loud talking, rude comments about other people's food, and inappropriate table manners. The students asked if Miss Karn's class could join them to discuss solutions because they sat near each other in the cafeteria. Mrs. Regent agreed to check with Miss Karn to arrange a large meeting, then complimented the class for giving such thoughtful attention to the others during the meeting. Susan adjourned the meeting.

The two teachers agreed that their classes could work together on solutions to these problems that were making many students feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in the cafeteria. Seemingly small, social problems during lunch had spilled over into the classroom, and had taken students' attention away from academic choices. The teachers believed these problems could be solved if they asked questions that would guide students toward making a reasonable plan.

The students' combined class discussion led to several possible solutions. The most popular solution was to have ambassador teams visit each of the other 5th-grade groups during their class meeting times. Each team made posters that refocused cafeteria rules into categories of polite conversation, good table manners that would demonstrate respect for oneself, and kind manners that avoided prejudice and showed respect to others. The students also decided that consequences of ignoring solutions proposed by ambassadors would lead to peer mediation. Students and teachers agreed that their solution worked. The students believed they had "done something" to make lunch relaxing and fun. The teachers found that the students returned from lunch each day ready to focus on academic choices.

This entire scenario may seem ideal to you. Realistically, class meetings last for about 30 minutes and the teacher facilitates in order to keep the process active and fair, with no negative "put-downs." Trying one solution does not always solve problems, but the meetings can be invaluable because students learn social and academic skills in the process of problem solving, and meet many state standards within the meeting format. A great deal of teaching precedes a meeting, continues during the meeting, and extends beyond the meeting. Many teachers have been trained in The Responsive Classroom approach to teaching and learning from the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC). You may learn more about the organization by visiting its Web site, www.responsiveclassroom.org, or by writing to: Northeast Foundation for Children, 71 Montague City Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301.

Cordially,

—Jeanie Burnett (burnett@kutztown.edu),
Vice President for Intermediate/Middle Childhood

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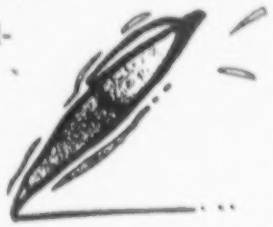

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The Pedagogy of Meaningful Writing:

A Pen Pal Project Between 1st-Graders in a Louisiana Public School and Early Childhood Education Majors at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

James D. Kirylo, Assistant Professor, University of Alabama at Birmingham;
Courney Millet, LaPlace Elementary School Principal;
Akina Luckett, Elementary Teacher and Graduate Student, University of Alabama at Birmingham;
Mireille Guindon, Early Childhood Major, University of Alabama at Birmingham

There is no better way for children to experience meaningful writing than to be engaged in authentic activities that foster purpose, awareness, significance, and audience (Barr & Johnson, 1997; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994). Moreover, for early childhood education majors to examine and come to a critical awareness of how young children process writing, they must be exposed to and involved in a variety of activities in which youngsters learn and write (Ceprano & Garan, 1998).

In this article, we explain how a pen pal activity cultivated purpose, significance, and an audience for 1st-graders in a public school located in the New Orleans area. In addition, the pen pal project helped early childhood majors at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) cultivate a more authentic awareness of the cognitive and literacy development of young children.

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Getting Started

A pen pal project can be successful in every elementary classroom, provided that there is an environment in which children are willing to take risks and teachers are supportive, value the activity, and are willing to take the time (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Millet & Kirylo, 1997). Teachers and children in two 1st-grade classrooms in a public school in the New Orleans area participated in such a project. One 1st-grade class was a regular education class with twenty-two 1st-graders of varied academic levels, and the other 1st-grade class was an inclusion class that included not only regular education children, but also several children with various disabilities.

The 1st-grade teachers discussed with their children how letter writing can be an avenue for expressing thoughts, ideas, and concerns. They also discussed with them how letter writing can be an outlet for creative writing and/or illustrating. Children were encouraged to write about anything in their letters, from what they ate for lunch, to their favorite color, to discussions about their family and friends. Sometimes, teachers gave the children a prompt or an idea in order to stimulate thinking. The teachers did not grade the letters and encouraged the children to use invented spelling and to write at their developmental levels. By not talking about grades and encouraging children to use invented spelling, the teachers stressed the value of the personal intent of writing without fear of criticism and judgment, and led the children to see the connection between writing and their own lives (Czerniewska, 1992; Dahl & Farnan, 1998; Kirylo, 1994).

Children were encouraged to write about anything in their letters, from what they ate for lunch, to their favorite color, to discussions about their family and friends.

It was explained to the early childhood education majors from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) that they would be participating in a pen pal project with 1st-graders from Louisiana. It was also clarified to the education majors that the purpose of the project was threefold: 1) to underscore the importance of understanding the meaning of audience and facilitating authentic literacy activities for young children, 2) to understand the importance of being engaged in an activity that exposes them to an experience whereby they can have the opportunity to examine how young children process writing, and 3) to appreciate that the teaching of writing can be simultaneously enjoyable and meaningful.

How the Pen Pal Project Was Conducted

The UAB education majors were given the names of their pen pals at a Monday evening class, and they initiated the writing of the letters. The letters were sent the next day by overnight mail. The letters arrived at the Louisiana school on Wednesday afternoon, and the 1st-grade teachers scheduled Thursday mornings as the time for their

children to respond. On Friday morning, the principal mailed the letters back by overnight mail, in time for the following Monday night class. This routine occurred for three months.

Each Monday evening, a buzz of excitement permeated the room when the education majors received their letters. After reading their letters, they diligently worked on being neat in their manuscript writing as well as thoughtfully responding to the children's questions. In addition, the education majors sent their pen pals photos, treats, pencils, bookmarkers, and other things.

Of course, when the 1st-graders received their letters on Thursday mornings with the various things from their pen pals, they were excited and eager to write them back. As the 1st-graders wrote their letters, the respective teachers and para-professionals circulated around the two classes to assist children as the letters were written. And when they completed their letters, they, too, included pictures and treats for the UAB education majors.

The Power of Print

The pen pal project cultivated a learning environment in the 1st-grade classrooms, where writing became what Dahl and Farnan (1998) call the "social and personal power of print" (p. 28).

For example, Jordan, the 1st-grader, sent Jerome, the education major, a letter about how he likes to fish.

Sept. 23, 1999

Dear Jerome
I like to fish,
Do You like to fish?
Wut is Your favi color.

Your friend
Jordan

Jerome responded to Jordan about fishing and mentioned how he, too, likes to fish. Validating a child's writing is extremely important because it helps give the young writer confidence and a willingness to take risks (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Millet & Kirylo, 1997).

September 27, 1999

Dear Jordan
I love to fish. My brother has a boat and we go fishing a lot. The biggest fish I ever caught was a six-pound bass. What kind of fish do you fish for? Blue is my favorite color. I like your art.

Your friend,
Jerome

Of course, recognizing the importance of modeling, Jerome should have started a new paragraph when he changed the subject. Because of the limited space on the paper, however, he was not able to do so.

In response to Jordan's next letter, Jerome continued to validate Jordan's writing. In addition, Jerome expressed a warmth in his writing when he starts his letter with "Hey buddy!" Clearly, through Jerome's responses, Jordan received validation and affirmation, exemplifying the importance of audience, purpose, significance, and the social value of writing.

Oct. 7, 1999

Dear Jerome,
I like base ball. I do not like football, I wil send you a base ball card I caughta big angel fish. Thanks for the Pencil.

Your friend,
Jordan

October 11, 1999

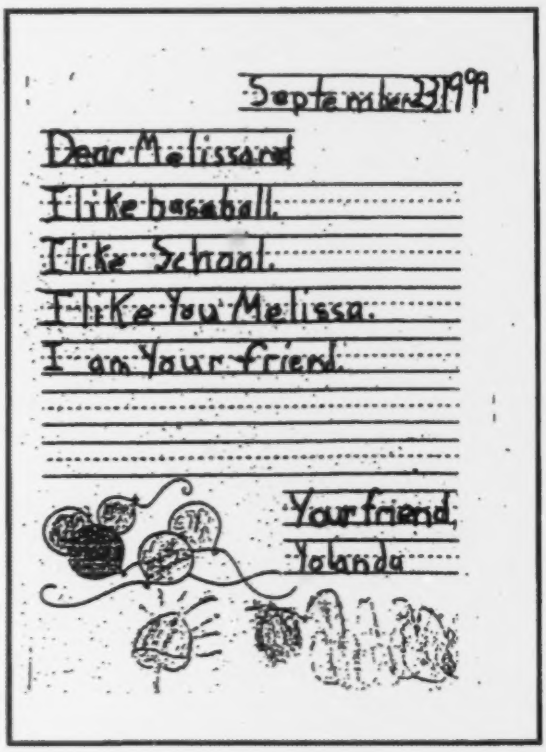
Dear Jordan,
Hey buddy! I am glad you like baseball. I collect baseball cards. Who is your favorite baseball player? I like the Atlanta Braves. I will send you some baseball cards soon!

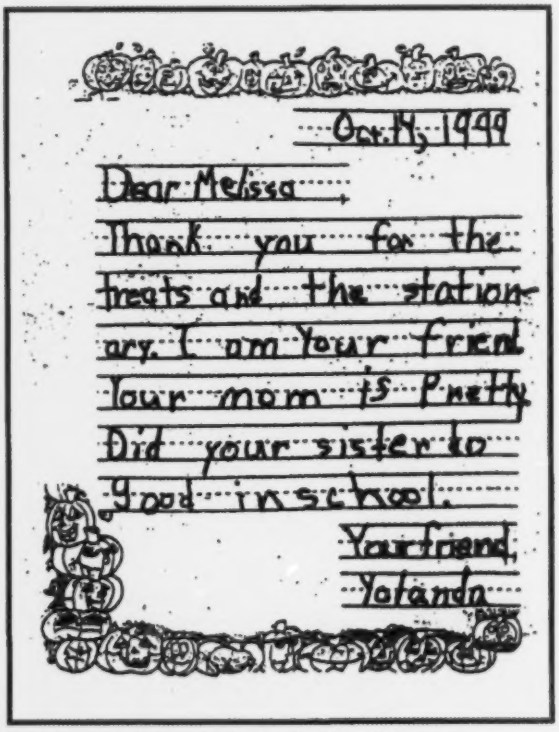
Your friend, Jerome

In addition to providing a forum that fostered the social and personal power of writing for the 1st-graders, the activity was also valuable for them in that they improved their writing fluency. For

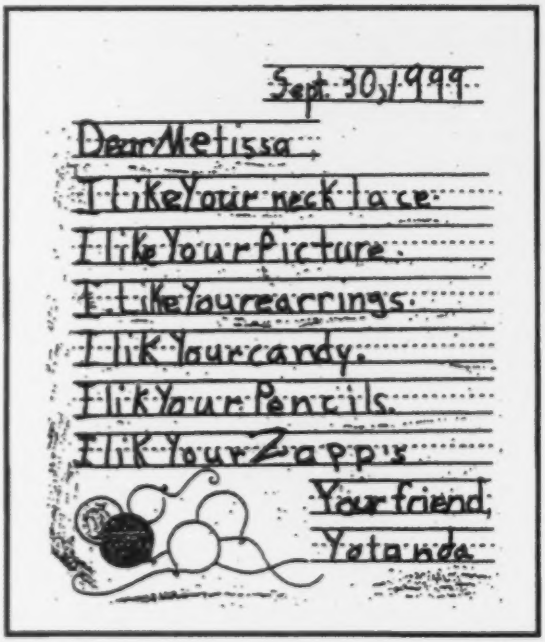
example, in her correspondence with Melissa on September 23 and 30, Yolanda's letters mostly all began with "I like . . ."

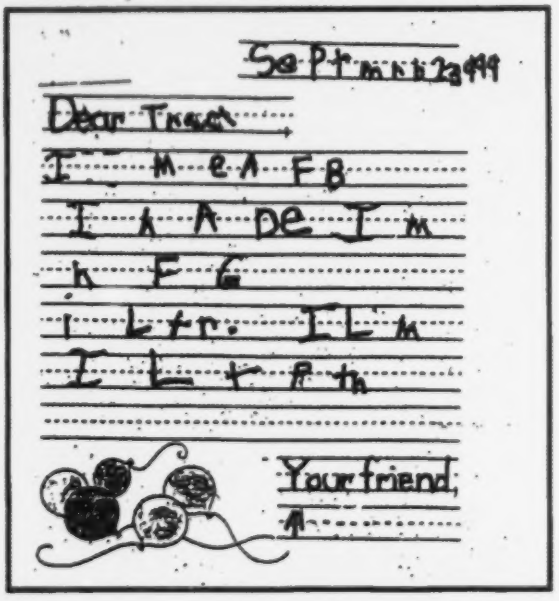
Clearly, in examining Yolanda's letter from October 14, one can see an improvement in her writing fluency.




Oct. 14, 1999
Dear Melissa,
Thank you for the treats and the stationary. I am Your friend Your mom is Pretty Did your sister do Good in school.
Your friend,
Yolanda

Many children in the inclusion classroom experienced a growth in their spelling abilities. For example, in Al's letter of September 23, his text is essentially written as consonants. Graves (1994)





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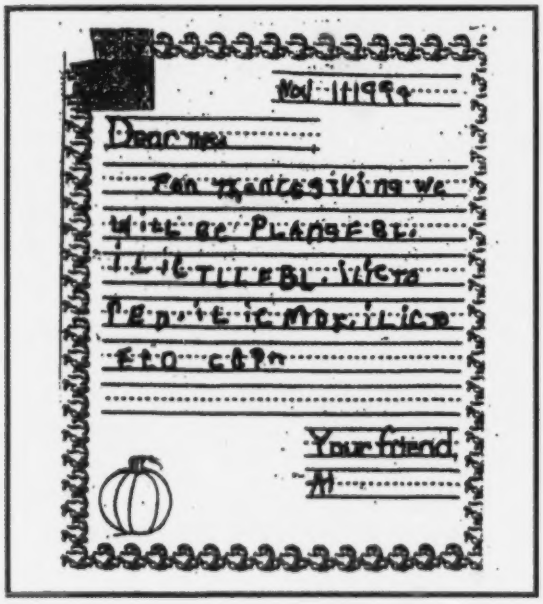
points out that, based on how a word sounds, young children typically estimate the exact spelling, which evolves from consonants to final spelling (Graves, 1994).

In his November 11 letter, Al had progressed from consonants to inventive spelling. Again, Graves (1994) asserts, "Inventive spelling allows children to begin to make meaning before they know how to actually spell a word" (p. 257).



writing, but also had authentic and motivating reasons to do so. Morrow (1997) asserts, "Children are highly motivated in their desire to participate in collaborative literacy activities" (p. 86). Jontrell, a 1st-grader, affirmed the point when asked how he liked writing to his pen pal: "I liked writing to her because it was fun." Moreover, another 1st-grader stated, "I learned to put commas, periods, the date, and 'Your friend' whenever you write to somebody."

Dahl and Farnan (1998) maintain that through writing activities, children have an opportunity to develop as individuals as well as to grow in their social world. For many young children, travel to other states or regions may be limited. Consequently, we believe the pen pal project fostered among the 1st-graders an awareness and appreciation of people in other geographic areas. Moreover, the project also furthered a cultural awareness for the early education majors. For example, the 1st-graders were proud when they sent Zapp's Chips to the early childhood education majors. They were proud because Zapp's Chips are made and packaged near their school in Louisiana.

For the education majors, they learned that the social significance of writing is fundamental in fostering literacy development (Dahl & Farnan, 1998; Heller, 1991). As Janae, an education major, disclosed, " . . . we developed a relationship and

Reflection

We believe that the pen pal activity was a beneficial learning experience for both the 1st-graders and the early childhood education majors. The 1st-graders participated in a meaningful experience that fostered writing in an authentic way that cultivated purpose, significance, and audience. As Dolly, one of the participating teachers, stated, "This project gave the children a meaningful purpose for writing. It was important to them." The pen pal activity demonstrated the importance and value of writing whereby, as Graves (1983) declares, "The child's marks say, 'I am' " (p. 3).

The 1st-graders not only had multiple opportunities to work on the conventions of

Through writing activities, children have an opportunity to develop as individuals as well as to grow in their social world.

special bond with each other through our writing. It really shows the power of writing and the connections that can be made." In addition, through examining the 1st-grade letters, the education majors were able to observe how emergent writers process writing. As Shannon said, "The activity was educational for me because I have had very little contact with 1st-graders. I was amazed to see invented spelling first hand." Moreover, Leslie affirmed that the pen pal activity was a beneficial "hands-on assignment for us to see the progression of writing abilities in children." Lastly, the education majors came to the awareness that to be a teacher of writing, one must understand that it takes time, consistency, and variety.

We think this pen pal project was a unique activity that had a positive effect for all involved. The 1st-graders were engaged in meaningful and purposeful writing, and the early childhood education majors were participating in an activity that exposed them to the ways that young children process writing, thereby strengthening the theory and practice connection. And finally, the pen pal project received media attention—an article and photos were published in *The Times-Picayune*, the major newspaper in the New Orleans area. The media attention provided more awareness of the positive and constructive learning activities that are occurring in public schools.

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From the Vice President

Knowledge is the key to understanding adolescents: providing guidelines for parents

At the 2001 ACEI Annual International Conference and Exhibition in Toronto, the Intermediate/Middle Childhood Committee sponsored a special session. During this interesting and informative presentation, panelists Jill C. Hunter, Linda Matwichuk, and Kathy Olthof shared information related to using knowledge of intermediate and middle childhood students (ages 9-15) to foster more positive parent-child relationships and promote collaboration among teachers and parents.

Parents often describe adolescence as an extremely stressful and tension-filled period. Since adolescent-parent relationships are major factors in determining smooth transitions from preteen to teen to adult, any knowledge that educators can share to help parents better understand their children is very valuable. Parental education about physical, cognitive, and social characteristics that are unique to this stage of development could lead to more positive relationships between parents and adolescents, and contribute to adolescent school success.

Sensitive educators can provide facts about physical changes during this period, with an emphasis upon diversity in development and growth rates. The adults can help ease young adolescents' transition by answering questions directly, and reassuring them that their growth will balance out. Thus, when they reach adulthood, they won't go through life tripping over their "gargantuan" feet and landing on their "catcher-mitt" hands. Parental involvement in sensitive discussions about physical changes can lead to increased security for adolescents.

Teachers need to be aware of, and alert parents to, community support that is available for adolescents and their families in order to keep students socially, emotionally, and physically safe. It is important to help parents be aware of when their children are getting into dangerous situations. Linda Matwichuk suggests that the best advice to give parents is to spend time with adolescents and maintain open dialogues. They also can watch for abrupt or marked changes in academic performance or social activities.

What do adolescents consider to be the ideal parent? Jill Hunter found that children want parents who are happy people with good dispositions and a sense of humor. They want parents to create a happy home and set a good example. Young adolescents express a desire for their families to support their extracurricular activities.

Young Adolescents Say . . .

We want adults to:

- Listen to us and try to understand what we mean
- Treat us like grown-ups
- Accept us as we are, faults and all
- Trust us and expect our best
- Treat our friends with respect
- Guide us, love us, and let us *know* that they love us.

The working parent with 19 loads of laundry a week and daily trips to the grocery store gets tired. When confronted with a child's demand for undivided attention, the parent may overreact and snap, "I hear with my ears and listen with my brain—keep talking, I am listening!" So with all respect to busy parents, the following suggestions are offered:

- Listen empathetically, without judging; avoid overreacting; give undivided attention
- Be a coach rather than a judge; avoid nagging and lecturing; remain calm during discussions
- Offer choices of acceptable alternatives; problem-solve together; rotate family chores
- Develop mutual trust and respect; ask for adolescent's opinion and help often
- Keep sense of humor; use deserved praise; focus on positive actions
- Build family traditions; make regular photo album dates and family meetings
- Be available; have family meals; invite adolescent's friends for family meals
- Plan vacations together; involve grandparents when possible; tell family stories.

Parents must face the fact that they need to "let go" as their children struggle toward adulthood. Remember, however, that the butterfly cut free of the cocoon too soon will not survive. Young adolescents who are supported in safe environments by loving and caring adults can risk learning to apply strategies that will free them to be active participants in meaningful communities.

—Cordially, Jeanie Burnett
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Vice President for Intermediate/Middle Childhood

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